



# ELSAH HISTORY

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Our previous issue of "Elsah History" included illustrations and photos of Riverview House from 1847/50 to approximately 1940. This issue covers the recent forty-seven years. We are particularly grateful for the information provided by Miss Betty Cresswell who now lives in Alton but whose family lived in Riverview House from 1912 to 1939. The photo above is of Lillie and Rosa Pelliken sometime between 1925 and 1930. Rosa Reipke now lives in St. Ann, Missouri, and Tillie Lohr lives in Jerseyville, Illinois.  
(Photo source: Pat Farmer.)



*These photos make a dramatic jump to the 1960's. The upper photo (from the Illinois Farm Bureau), captures the romantic mystery which surrounded the Riverview property during the years that Ed and Magarie Rhoads lived in the house and operated an antique shop appropriately called "Rhoad's End." Magarie's parents purchased Riverview in 1939 from Catherine Cresswell and shortly thereafter the Rhoads moved into the house. It was during the next twenty-five years that Magarie became legendary for her signaling of passing barges with a hand wave or a flashing light. (See "Elsah History" Nos. 48/49, 1985.)*





It was also during these years that Odd Fellows' Hall was razed (1951) and the River Road completed and opened to Elsie in 1965. Soon after his return from WWII, Ed Rhoads covered most of Riverview with thick black roofing paper using tar for glue and nails to secure the pieces. The Rhoads were attempting to transform the appearance of the house into a coastal New England fishing shed as a backdrop to their interest in collecting river buoys and fishing apparatus. (The tar paper may also have had something to do with reducing the maintenance of the exterior and providing a better wind barrier for the then uninsulated building.) The front porch was also enclosed at this time. And along with the building of a garage on Mississippi St., the east side ground level was raised by several feet.

Ed Rhoads Sr. passed away in 1971 and the property was publicly auctioned that year. Acting for The Principia Corporation, Henry Holt offered the highest bid and the property's future now rested with Principia.

From 1971 to 1973 Principia did extensive thinking and research into possible uses of the property. The Village Inn (Bradley House), had closed and some felt that an inn or bed and breakfast would serve the community well. Students proposed converting Riverview to a craftshop and coffee house. Some even suggested razing the entire complex and expanding the parking lot! Paul Williams (former editor of this newsletter and professor of English at the college), commented to the school newspaper in 1972, "It (Riverview) is the most sensitive and important house in the village from a historical point of view because it's our front door." This unsettled time coincided with the establishment of Historic Elsie Foundation (1971) and the preparation of Elsie's first historic zoning ordi-

nanances. And in 1973, Elsie was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. All of these accomplishments may have fostered a prevailing desire to save and restore the Riverview property.

However, in late April, 1973, the "unheard of" happened: For the first time in its long history, Riverview was invaded by floodwater. Throughout its many years situated at the Elsie waterfront, floods had tickled the porch boards or filled the dirt cellar. But never had it risen to the heights recorded in the "Superflood of 1973." (The Corps of Engineers declared 1973 to be a "once-every-two-hundred-year-flood.") The photo above was taken the day of the crest — April 19, 1973. (Interestingly, Riverview had originally been built above the record flood of 1846. The 1973 flood was not a record for volume of water, but the restrictions of the river with levees and dams has had a marked effect upon the height of flood waters since the 1930's.)

Fortunately, in 1973 the house was virtually empty. The College was renting the premises to the Phil Petersons who moved out only when the water pressed against the downstairs flooring sufficiently to feel like "solid cement." No effort was made to sandbag the property. The receding waters left a smelly layer of mud and some warped floor boards. The hot summer months which followed did much to dry the house out. During these months, Glenn Felch, who was just joining the college faculty in the Studio Art Department, spent much time considering the possibilities of restoring the little outbuilding for use as a studio. By November of that year, Glenn decided to purchase the entire property convinced that it could regain some of its more graceful appearance and that flood protection was a possibility.

We hope our readers have enjoyed these two issues of "Elsie History." Few buildings in Elsie have been as well documented with photographs as Riverview. Nevertheless, a standing invitation is open for the submission of similar "essays" by those who have owned or worked with other Elsie buildings. Of particular interest would be an article on the once numerous barns of Elsie.



Anyone who has restored an old house knows how much debris is generated in the process. The two photos above were taken in December, 1973. Sometime in the 1890's a summer kitchen had been added to the house. Often "remodeled" in the following years, it was in very poor condition and needed to be entirely rebuilt. The well water had fouled and so the adjacent well was filled in. (In 1979, an eight foot deep cistern was also filled in with excavations from the cellar.) The Felches made every effort to save original sash units in spite of the challenges this created to energy efficiency. The window pictured is in the kitchen and probably dates back to the 1850's (although it was moved from a previous location in the house sometime in the 1880's.)



With the summer kitchen temporarily removed, the rear of the house looked like this until late summer, 1974. At that time, a new roof was urgently required because a strong storm removed several large sections of tar paper and drenched much of the interior of the house. (A crisis which convinced Glenn to strip the entire house of its old plaster-and-lathe walls.) Glenn's fiancée (Judy McCreary), and members of her family came to the rescue in making needed roof repairs and eventually providing a completely new one. As many as seven layers of old roofing had to be removed in some areas - one wooden shingle, one tin, and five asphalt. (Judy and Glenn were married in December, 1975, and due to the unsettled condition of the interior of the house, they decided to spend the winter in Judy's Principia apartment.)



By November 1974, a completely new roof was finished, tar paper partially removed from the facade, and swatches of test color applied for consideration. The new entrance to Elsie had also been completed. Throughout the restoration years the generous giving of time by friends was of invaluable aid to both progress and morale. Here, Judy is aided by Sandy McEwan (Stack) and Jim Green in 1975.



Also by November, 1974, the familiar Riverview profile was beginning to take shape again. Over the next fourteen years one room at a time was redone and the house was completely re-wired, re-plumbed and insulated. The 1978 photo of the northwest corner of the house shows tarpaper still to be removed. The odd bend in the west side of the house corresponds to the shape of the lot.





The Riverview complex in 1967. (Maude Trovillion's Doll Museum is on the far right.) The water in the foreground is not floodwater but rather a "pond" which had always existed until the change of the Elsay entrance from Mill to Mississippi Street in 1974. Sand and old road debris displaced the frog pond. Additional fill was added by the Felches to support the back yard retaining wall which collapsed in the 1973 flood. Old photos reveal that a variety of outbuildings existed on the property at various times.

The Riverview complex in November, 1987. The main house and original outbuildings have been restored and two new outbuildings added. The leanto (1979) was used by Judy as her blacksmith shop and the "barn" (1983) by Glenn as his studio. A temporary wooden garage constructed in 1976-7 has been removed revealing once again a 1940's stone wall. (Glenn's studio is of the same dimensions as the barn which originally stood in the upper back yard and which is documented with drawings provided by James Walter Cresswell in 1965 when Glenn was working on an Elsay project for a college class. The core of the present "barn" is a building moved to this site from a few lots away and known as "Earl's cottage.")



November, 1987. The Felches have sold the property to The Principia and the Charles Fyfe family have become the new residents. The gradually restored house had become "too large for just two people" and the Felches, in spite of their deep commitment to the spirit of Riverview, decided to move to Elsay's newest house — the much smaller McNair Gambrel recently replicated by Eric Mack and Co. on Palm Street in 1986-7. The grapevine decoration on the gable of Riverview was designed by the Felches to be compatible with the decoration on the rear gable. The Greek Revival front door with its two vertical panels is a custom-made replica of the original. Commenting on the future, Glenn looks eagerly forward to new owners "enjoying Riverview as much as we did and feeling the past in Elsay's history very much a part of daily life. A unique house, Riverview will guarantee its occupants a unique living experience!"